

## Consequences

A natural consequence is anything that happens naturally, with no adult interference. When you stand in the rain, you get wet. When you don't eat, you get hungry. When you forget your coat, you get cold.

Children usually feel bad or guilty when they make a mistake. Show empathy and understanding for what the child is experiencing: "I'll bet it was hard to go hungry (get wet, get that bad grade, lose your bicycle)." When it seems appropriate, you could add, "I love you and know you can sort this out." It can be difficult for parents to be supportive without rescuing or overprotecting, but it is one of the most encouraging things you can do to help your children develop a sense of capability.

## Natural Consequences

Let's look at an example of how natural consequences work.

Billy forgot his lunch every day. His Mum would interrupt her busy schedule to drive to school with his lunch. After learning about natural consequences, she decided that Billy might learn to remember his lunch if he experienced the natural consequence of forgetting. She first discussed this with Billy, letting him know she was confident that he could be responsible for remembering his lunch. She also told him she would no longer bring his lunch to school if he forgot it. It is very important and respectful to discuss, **In advance**, when you plan to change your behaviour.

Her intentions were sabotaged for a while because Billy's teacher took over and loaned him money for lunch when he forgot. It was not until Mother and Billy's teacher got together on a plan to allow Billy to learn from the natural consequences of his choices that his behaviour changed.

Billy tested the plan. The next time he forgot his lunch, he asked his teacher if he could borrow some lunch money. She said, "I'm sorry, Billy, but we agreed that you could handle your lunch problem by yourself." Billy then phoned his mother and demanded that she bring his lunch. Mum also kindly but firmly reminded him that he could handle the problem. Billy pouted for a while, even though one of his friends gave him half a sandwich.

After that, Billy seldom forgot his lunch. When he did forget it, he managed to find someone who would share some food with him.

Many adults don't have much tolerance for the whining, pouting and disappointment. Billy's mother did not find it easy to listen to her child be demanding, and it was difficult for her to allow him to experience being upset. She noticed some guilty feelings because he was hungry, but reminded herself that forgetting his lunch was really just a small mistake, one of many Billy would make in his lifetime. If she did not follow through on her plan, he would not be learning the life skill of getting a little more organized in the morning, and the good feelings of handling a problem himself. Instead he would be learning that whenever things didn't work out for him, he could whine or complain and get someone else to take care of his problems. Looking at it that way, his Mum was able to stay calmer.

Even though natural consequences often help children learn responsibility, there are times when natural consequences are not practical:

1. When a child is in danger. Adults cannot allow a child to experience the natural consequences of playing in the street, for example.
2. When natural consequences interfere with the rights of others. Adults cannot allow the natural consequences of allowing a child to throw rocks at another person, for example.
3. When the results of children's behaviour do not seem like a problem to them but the natural consequences will adversely affect their health and well being. For example, it does not seem like a problem to some children if they don't take a bath, don't brush their teeth, don't do their homework, or eat masses of junk food.

## *Logical Consequences*

Logical consequences are different from natural consequences in that they require the intervention of an adult. It is important to decide what kind of consequence would create a helpful learning experience that might encourage children to choose responsible cooperation.

### The Three Rs and an H of Logical Consequences

1. Related
2. Respectful
3. Reasonable
4. Helpful

Related means the consequence must be related to the behaviour.

Respectful means the consequence must not involve blame, shame or pain; and should be kindly but firmly enforced. It is also respectful to everyone involved.

Reasonable means the consequence must be reasonable from the child's point of view as well as the adult's.

Helpful means it will encourage change for everyone involved.

When a child writes on a desk, it is easy to conclude that the related consequence would be to have the child clean up the desk. But what happens if any of the other four Rs is missing?

If a teacher is not respectful and adds humiliation to his request that the desk be cleaned, it is no longer a logical consequence. Mr. Martin thought he was using a logical consequence when he said to Mary in front of the whole class, "Mary, I'm surprised that you would do such a stupid thing. Now clean up that desk or I'll have to let your parents know how disappointed I am in you." In this example, respect has been eliminated and the teacher did some 'piggy backing' with humiliation.

If a teacher is not reasonable and requests that a student clean every desk in the room to make sure she has learned her lesson, it is no longer a logical consequence. Reasonableness has been eliminated in favour of the power to ensure suffering. This is usually because of the

mistaken belief that children learn only if they suffer.

If the consequence is not helpful it is easier to be construed as punishment. When both parties agree that the consequence would be helpful, it is more likely to encourage change.

When a child spills milk, the related consequence is to have them clean up the spill. It is not respectful if you say, "How could you be so clumsy? That is the last time I'll let you pour milk." A more respectful comment would be, "Whoops. What do you need to do now?" (It is amazing how often the child knows what a solution would be, and how willing they are to do it, when asked respectfully.) If the child doesn't know what to do, it could be because you haven't taken time for training—thus making your expectation or request unreasonable. Handling it respectfully also demonstrates that mistakes are wonderful opportunities to learn. It would not be reasonable to ensure they suffer for their mistake by saying, "To make sure you learn, I want you to scrub the whole floor."

Actually, if adults eliminate one of the Four Rs so that consequences are not related, respectful, reasonable, and helpful, children may experience the Four Rs of Punishment.

1. Resentment ("This is unfair. I can't trust adults.")
2. Revenge ("They are winning now, but I'll get even.")
3. Rebellion ("I'll show them that I can do whatever I want")
4. Retreat, in the form of sneakiness ("I won't get caught next time.") or reduced self esteem ("I am a bad person.")

Suffering is not a requirement of logical consequences. For example, a child might enjoy cleaning up his desk. (This is fine, since the purpose of a logical consequence is to change the misbehaviour and find a solution, not to get revenge by causing suffering.)